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ABSTRACT

A conceptual model of undergraduate socialization is presented. The framework incorporates several elements of the models developed by Feldman (1972) and Hochbaum (1968), but combines these models in a different way and incorporates the more recent work of Astin (1978). Of particular concern is an examination of the complex covariation among (1) individual, group, and organizational sources of socializing intluences; (2) interpersonal mechanisms transmitting those influences; and (3) resultant socialization outcomes in various college settings. The three-dimensional model of undergraduate socialization is diagrammed. The vertical dimension (object of influence) shows three types of personal orientations, both cognitive and affective, that may be subject to modification as a result of participation in an organizational setting. The first two aspects are knowledge and values, and values are viewed as predispositions toward, or preferences for, various personal ends or life goals. One of the most important life decisions influenced by college attendance is occupational choice. The horizontal dimensions (source of influence) contains three aspects of college environments that have the potential for modifying students' orientations (i.e., people, normative contexts, and curriculum). Reference group theory is useful for identifying potential sources of socializing influences. Mechanisms of socialization that constitute the third dimension of the model include impersonal exposure (i.e., the reading list) and primary social relationships. To illustrate the use of the conceptual framework, an example from earlier research (Weidman, 1974) is discussed. The study examined the effects of norms and primary social relationships among faculty and students in academic departments on changes in undergraduates' occupational values. (SW)

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SOME CONCEPTUAL CONCERNS IN THE STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATE SOCIALIZATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR ASSESSING FACULTY IMPACT*

by

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SOME CONCEPTUAL CONCERNS IN THE STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATE SOCIALIZATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR ASSESSING FACULTY IMPACT

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a conceptual model of undergraduate socialization. The framework, while incorporating several elements of the models developed by Feldman (1972) and Hochbaum (1968), combines these models in a different way and incorporates the more recent work of Astin (1978). Of particular concern here is an examination of the complex covariation among (1) individual, group, and organizational sources of socializing influences; (2) interpersonal mechanisms transmitting those influences; and (3) resultant socialization outcomes in various college settings. The paper provides conceptual clarification and presents a framework for codifying the vast body of empirical research on various aspects of college impact. The paper includes an example of the application of the framework from the author's own research, and consideration of its implications for assessing the impact of faculty on student learning.

This paper presents a conceptual model of undergraduate student socialization. The framework, while incorporating several elements of the models developed by Feldman (1972), Hochbaum (1968), and Pace (1969), combines them in a somewhat different way. Of particular concern here is an examination of the complex covariation among (1) individual, group, and organizational sources of socializing influences; (2) interpersonal mechanisms transmitting those influences; and (3) resultant socialization outcomes in various college settings.

Two general questions that deal with the socializing effects of an individual's participation in an organizational environment reflect the basic assumptions underlying the model. One pertains to social interaction: What are the interpersonal processes through which individuals' values are influenced? The other pertains to organizational structure: What are the various characteristics of socializing organizations that exert similar or dissimilar influences on members' values? Wheeler (1966, p. 54) gives the following reasons for considering both the individual and the organization in studying socialization:

> Just as individuals may become differently socialized because of differences in past experience, motivations, and capacities, so may they become differently socialized because of differences in the structure of the social settings in which they interact. . .
>
> The guiding assumption is simply that in many situations individuals remain highly adaptable and flexible, prepared to fit their behavior into the demands of the current social context.

The result is that we must not look only at underlying motives, that is, at how people have internalized deeply rooted features of the

social order. Much can also be learned about the processes of socialization by taking a close look at structures and situations within which it occurs.

The Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 contains the three-dimensional model of undergraduate socialization under consideration. This model is presented as a tentative, non-exhaustive exploration of undergraduate socialization. Lines between parts simply delineate clusters of variables for conceptual clarity; they do not define rigid boundaries among clusters. The vertical dimension (object of influence) shows three types of personal orientations, both cognitive and affective, that may be subject to modification as a result of participation in an organizational setting. In fact, the first two aspects, knowledge and values, are described by Brim (1966, p. 3) as three general outcomes of socialization that "make (people) more or less able members of their society." In the context of the model, values are simply predispositions toward, or preferences for, various personal ends or life goals. One of the most important life decisions influenced by college attendance is occupational choice. In addition to providing the educational credentials necessary for access to upper white collar, professional, and managerial occupations, the traditional college education has also provided experiences and resources for the student to develop more generalized orientations toward work and leisure activities. In fact, Beardslee and O'Dowd (1962, pp. 606-607) assert that "students perceive occupations largely in terms of their implications for a style of life and a place in the community status system." Furthermore, the impact of college attendance on career choice and change in

occupational values has been a topic of continued research interest (Rosenberg 1957; Davis 1965; Astin and Panos 1969). Other significant life decisions that may be influenced by college attendance include marriage, ultimate residence location, and choice of graduate training.

The horizontal dimensions of Figure 1 (Source of Influence), contains three aspects of college environments that have the potential for modifying students' orientations. Reference group theory is useful for identifying potential sources of socializing influences. Kemper (1968, p. 32) provides an inclusive definition that is particularly helpful in understanding the nature of a reference group:

> In general, a reference group is a group, collectivity, or person which the actor takes into account in some manner in the course of selecting a behavior from among a set of alternatives, or in making a judgment about a problematic issue. A reference group helps to orient the actor in a certain course, whether of action or of attitude.

Clearly, both individuals and normative contexts may conceivably constitute reference groups. Among those individuals within the college environment who have strong socialization potentials are faculty and peers (Feldman and Newcomb 1969, pp. 236, 237, 251). Students' parents, though usually not members of the college environment, have also been shown to have particularly significant impacts on their offspring's career choice and more generalized occupational value orientations (Mortimer 1974).

For purposes of the present discussion, normative contexts may be considered to be settings populated by reasonably well-defined groups or collectivities of individuals. One example of a normative context with a relatively good socialization potential is the residence grouping (Feldman and Newcomb 1969, pp. 196-226).

Another potent normative context is the academic department (Astin 1978; Weidman 1979b). In a study of Michigan State University students, Lehmann and Dressel (1962, pp. 221-223) found that seniors rated major field courses and instructors (along with close friends) as having the most significant influences on their attitudes and values during college. Practically all post-freshman students have some affiliation with an academic department since it tends to be the unit through which degree requirements are formulated and certification of their successful completion is made. Because a student usually takes more courses in his major field than in any other, the academic department serves as a focus for both faculty and student influence. Vreeland and Bidwell (1966, p. 238) describe the department as follows:

> The department. . .is the principal workplace of the college, has relatively well-defined goals and expectations for students, and commands powerful normative and utilitarian sanctions.

Academic departments serve a dual focus: first, for the normative influence of faculty and peers, and second, for the potential socializing impacts of curriculum. Thielens (1966, p. 43) provides some of the more convincing evidence of the impact of the formal curriculum:

> At Columbia, our data have shown, the reading list appears to be a much more important mechanism for bringing about change in students than either of two types of face-to-face relationships with teachers, the lecture and informal discussion outside of class.

Thielens mentions one and implies the other of the two mechanisms of socialization that constitute the third dimension of the model shown in Figure 1. The conceptual starting point for this aspect of the model

is Shibutani's (1955, p. 568) assertion that "socialization is a product of a gradual accumulation of experiences with certain people, particularly those with whom we stand in primary relations." While Thielens found limited impact of primary social relationships with faculty on change in students' orientations, others have found much stronger patterns of faculty impact reflected through primary interaction (Weidman 1974; Wilson et. al, 1975). Thielens' assertion about the importance of the reading list for undergraduate socialization suggests that impersonal exposure can also be an important mechanism of socialization.

The foregoing is an admittedly sketchy presentation. However, the conceptual model has been developed in the hope that it might serve as a point of departure for further conceptual and empirical study both of student impact and of socialization in organizations more generally. The essence of the model as it applies to the relationships among individual and organizational variables in the study of undergraduate socialization can be summarized as follows: Just as students differ in their patterns of interaction and personal orientations upon entrance, colleges differ in their structuring, intentionally or not, of normative contexts, opportunities for interaction among members, and course content.

Empirical Applications of the Conceptual Framework

An ideal empirical application of the framework would involve simultaneous consideration of as many facets of the model as possible, subject, of course, to the constraints involved in the development of adequate empirical indicators of the conceptual dimensions.

To illustrate the use of this conceptual framework, I will discuss briefly an example from my research (Weidman 1974). In this study, I was interested in examining the effects of norms and primary social relationships

among faculty and students in academic departments on changes in undergraduates' occupational values. In terms of the model, the dependent variable was the object of influence, change in occupational values. The independent variables were the source of influence (departmental norms) and the mechanisms (primary social relationships) transmitting those influences.

As is often the case in moving from a conceptual formulation to the operationalization of variables, empirical considerations were no less complex than conceptual considerations. Indicators of the variables investigated sometimes included more than one category within the model. For instance, determining the normative characteristics of an academic department involved ascertaining the orientations held by salient groups of people participating in departmental activities, concentrating especially on faculty and undergraduate majors. Consequently, to get indicators of departmental norms, I aggregated survey responses of faculty and undergraduate majors separately on measures of orientations toward the desirability of liberal education and vocational education as potential outcomes of a college program. Each student was then assigned the means for each normative variable for both faculty and other undergraduate majors in his department. Thus, the emphasis here was on the collective influence of people comprising normative contexts within the structural confines of an academic department.

Since there were two sources of normative influences for each department, indicators of the primary social relationships (influence mechanisms) linking an individual student to each normative group were also derived for the data analysis. Here the problem was not combining aspects of personal and impersonal social relationships, but rather obtaining reasonable estimates

of primary social interaction. For primary ties to departmental peers, the measure used was the proportion of a student's close friends majoring in the same department. For primary ties to departmental faculty, the measure used incorporated both frequency and intensity of sentiments involved in social interaction with faculty in the major department, again as reported by the student respondent.

As I was interested in examining the joint effects of a theoretically specified set of four independent variables and longitudinal data were available for the dependent variables, I chose the statistical technique of analysis of covariance for analyzing the relationships among the variables. The dependent variable was the student respondent's senior score for a particular occupational value; the covariate was that student's score as a newly entering freshman for the same occupational value. The four independent variables were the norms concerning the desirability of liberal or vocational education as potential outcomes of a college program held by faculty and peers in the student respondent's major department, and the student's primary social ties to each of these normative groups. Separate analyses were performed by sex of the student.

Readers interested in the details of variable construction and data analysis should see the research monograph (Weidman 1974). I will simply summarize the general trends in the data. Results from the analysis of covariance suggest that change in women's occupational value orientations are most strongly related to primary social interaction with departmental faculty. For men, on the other hand, changes in occupational value orientations are most strongly related to normative characteristics of their major department. Unfortunately, statistical interactions between norms

and social relationships were often difficult to interpret, leaving effects of covariation among independent variables either unclear or totally unspecified.

In subsequent research (Weidman 1979a) using the same longitudinal data files, the 1969 ACE-Carnegie surveys (see Trow 1975 for a complete description of these surveys), the analysis was expanded to include change in both career values and career aspirations and a multiple regression approach was employed. Findings from this study suggested that the effects of the normative climates of academic departments were not particularly striking in terms of the significance of specific indicators. The only significant effect of departmental norms was the negative one for student liberal education norms on prestige of female English majors' senior career choices. Social relationships with departmental faculty, on the other hand, were positively related to prestige of senior career choice for males in mathematics and history, and females in history. This relative absence of effects for particular indicators of departmental climate is similar to the findings reported by Hearn and Olzak (1981). However, as was also the case with Hearn and Olzak (1981), for one group of women (history majors) more of the total explained variance in prestige of 1969 career choice could be attributed directly to the departmental environment (33%) than to any other block of variables.

Contrary to my previous (Weidman 1974) findings for departmental impacts on career values which suggested that women are influenced more than men by social relationships with departmental faculty, this more recent study shows virtually no sex differences on this dimension in its impact on career aspirations, i.e., student-faculty interaction is important for students of both sexes. Institutional characteristics appear to have

even a bit more important influence for women (especially history majors) than for men in the four departments included (English, history, political science, and mathematics). These findings underscore the importance of college and major choice in the career development process.

Also of interest is the finding that while the effects of social relationships with departmental faculty on women's career aspirations tend to be positive, the effects of peer norms for women in English are negative. Apparently, those women who emphasize relationships with peers and extra-curricular attainment tend to aspire to lower prestige occupations than their counterparts who emphasize relationships with departmental faculty and curricular attainments.

While these results are not unequivocal, they do illustrate the applicability of the conceptual framework discussed in this paper for the systematic study of undergraduate socialization.

Discussion

While the conceptual framework developed in this paper emphasizes the responses of undergraduates to the college environment, it also illustrates the importance of including structural and normative dimensions that can be measured by aggregating individual responses to get "collective conceptions" held by actors in a normative context. This is particularly important when trying to understand faculty influences on students since current research by Thielens (1977) suggests that undergraduates tend generally to minimize the effects of faculty on their learning. This can have serious consequences on campus:

> Held widely on campus, student learning definitions can produce collective consequences. Individual judgments which underestimate

teachers' classroom impact can cumulate into tenets of student folklore, and be passed on as ever more certain truth to new freshman generations (Thielens 1977, p. 177).

That there may be a much more generalized tendency of late adolescents to underestimate the influences of significant adults on both their cognitive and affective growth is suggested by recent research by Davies and Kandel (1981). In examining parental influences on adolescents' educational plans, these authors collected data about both the adolescents' perceptions of parental influences and the parents' self-reported attitudes and behavior. This research suggests that:

> . . . perceptual measures inflate estimates of interpersonal influence. Independent data from parents document that perceptual measures of significant others' attributes reflect not only attributes of the person being perceived but also attributes of the perceiver (Davies and Kandel 1981, p. 363).

The obverse of the foregoing may also be true. Machlup (1979), for instance, argues that students may be deluded by the facile lecturer, the "silver-tongued orator," into believing that they comprehend what might be very complex material. The flow of the argument as well as the logic and continuity of the presentation may be very misleading and result in less effort on the part of the student in trying to digest the material. The inept teacher, on the other hand, may have the effect of requiring greater study on the part of the student and, subsequently, a more substantive learning outcome.

> An inept teacher, on the other hand, by presenting the same material in a dull manner so that the students fall asleep or let their thoughts wander and with so little expository skill as to

> leave the student adrift and unable to see how things hang together, gives the students a feeling of uncertainty and makes them sense a need for clarification, which they may try to find in the assigned readings and problems. Thus, the bad teachers' students spend much more time reading and studying for the course than they would if they comprehended what their instructor taught (Machlup 1979, p. 378).

All of this suggests that student-faculty relationships and faculty teaching styles do not always have the effects on students that are conventionally attributed to them. Interpersonal relationships with faculty appear to be related consistently to attitudes and aspirations of undergraduates but the effects of faculty on cognitive outcomes await more systematic empirical verification. Suffice it to say that there is a need for research which uses measures, both of influence and outcome, that are derived as independently as possible of student perceptions.

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FIGURE 1.

A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF UNDERGRADUATE SOCIALIZATION